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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000194

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PTER PREL YM COUNTER TERRORISM TERFIN DOMESTIC POLITICS

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR,S 1/19 MEETING WITH SHEIKH AL-AHMAR:
ZINDANI, OPPOSITION CONTACTS

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull, reasons 1.5 (b), (d).

1. (C) Summary. In a 1/19 meeting with Ambassador, Sheikh al-Ahmar appealed for more high-level contact with the Embassy and stoutly defended the bona fides of Sheikh Zindani and al-Iman University which the Ambassador disputed. The Islah leader,s unusually conciliatory approach appears calculated to forestall the long-pending U.S. designation of Zindani as engaged in terrorist financing. End Summary.

2. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM, called on Parliament Speaker Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar on January 19 at the latter,s invitation. Ahmar, who also heads the Islah Party, had a two-part agenda to discuss with Ambassador. After opening discussion of Yemen,s economy and potential for increased international investment and tourism, Ahmar explained at some length his desire for increased high-level contact between Islah and Embassy Sanaa -- especially personal contact between himself and Ambassador. He reviewed his own status as head of a major tribal coalition, in addition to his party and Parliamentary roles, noting that he represented the views of a broad sector of the Yemeni population. Ahmar stressed that dialogue between the Embassy and Islah could help control rumors, dispel misinformation and avoid misunderstanding. Finally, Ahmar touted his role in buttressing Yemen,s security and stability, including by reining in mosque preachers and young Islahis.

3. (C) Ambassador welcomed the prospect of increased dialogue with Islah and its leader, pointing out that the Embassy had long maintained regular working level contact with Islah officials. He underscored the Embassy,s commitment to dialogue with Parliament and with all parties, including the opposition.

4. (C) Ahmar,s second focus was on al-Iman University and its head, Sheikh Abdul Majid Zindani. Sheikh al-Ahmar said he knew the USG had "question marks" regarding Zindani, and asserted that Zindani is a reasonable, responsible man and that al-Iman is a normal educational institution and not linked to extremism. The Ambassador disagreed and noted that ROYG security authorities had found that numerous extremist suspects had links with al-Iman University and questions about its status are thus justified. Similarly, questions about Zindani are well founded, the Ambassador insisted. Ahmar reiterated that Islah felt a responsibility for Zindani and al-Iman University, and asked that the Ambassador discuss with him any adverse information the USG might receive on either. The Sheikh concluded that dialogue could dispel misunderstanding. The Ambassador reiterated a willingness for contacts with Islah as an opposition party, but pointedly declined to enter into a dialog on Zindani or al-Iman University.

5. (C) Comment: Ahmar,s pitch on behalf of Sheikh Zindani may be an attempt to pre-empt the long-pending U.S. designation of Zindani (and/or institutions linked to him) as engaged in terrorist financing. It is notable that Ahmar declined to make any similar pitch on behalf of Sheikh Mohamed Ali Hassan al-Moayed, who awaits trial in the United States after extradition from Germany. End comment.

HULL